

# TURNERS FALLS RIVERCULTURE

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## Strategic Planning Report

September 2012

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Prepared for and in  
Collaboration with  
Turners Falls RiverCulture  
Executive Committee:  
Lisa Davol  
Frank Abandanza  
Walter Ramsey

Technical Assistance  
Sponsored by:  
***Massachusetts Downtown  
Initiative***



Department of Housing and  
Community Development

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Prepared by:

**FinePoint**  
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## Summary

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RiverCulture has done a masterful job with the available resources to create a sense of place and improve the quality of life for residents in Turners Falls. RC has also been successful in creating a very positive image for Turners Falls that attracts visitors and businesses from outside of town. The purpose of the strategic planning work conducted over the last few months was to help chart a course that will allow the organization to continue its valuable work and to target efforts in the most effective manner.

During this planning process, we worked with RiverCulture (RC) to assess the organization's current status and review potential new directions. In the end, RC agreed to focus the organization's efforts on establishing a regularly scheduled monthly "night out" event similar to "1st Friday" or "3rd Thursday" events held in other communities. This course of action has several benefits, as follows.

- First, this approach will ensure that RC remains "relevant". In recent years, several other organizations have begun developing events and have needed less of RC's assistance. Through the planning process, RC determined that it could best serve the community by creating a platform that will allow other organizations and individual artisans to create events, exhibits, performances, etc. and be part of an overall structured monthly event. RC will create the overall brand, develop a theme for each month, coordinate the event and handle marketing.
- Second, this idea was met with significant enthusiasm among the cultural organization partners and business owners. This new focus may help to keep the stakeholders energized around RiverCulture activities and revitalization efforts.
- Third, there is a direct connection to the economic development objectives of increasing foot traffic and facilitating business development. This type of event would attract customers on a more regular basis. It would also offer the retail and restaurant businesses a way to actively participate with special promotions and extended business hours, providing a direct commercial connection and hopefully leading to increased revenue. For example . . . a nightclub owner indicated that he would develop a special cocktail based on the particular month's theme . . . a burrito restaurant owner said he could host a musical performance on event nights and that he has plenty of wall space for art exhibits. . . a retail store owner said he would be happy to participate, stay open late and serve refreshments.
- Fourth, this approach provides a way for RC to increase its impact with limited capacity. The organization is currently stretched very thin and every new event puts a strain on the very lean machine because they start from scratch each time. Establishing a "template" for a monthly event could help the organization do more with less effort. Marketing materials, contracts, licenses, insurance documents, etc. could all be developed and then used over and over again. The predictability of the event tasks and schedule would extend the longevity of volunteers and increase their ability to perform tasks independently. Having regularly scheduled similar events might also help RC to develop impact measurement tools and persuade participating organizations and businesses to implement these tools on a regular basis.

## Overview of Strategic Planning Technical Assistance

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It was my pleasure to work with RiverCulture over the last few months. The consulting services were funded through a Technical Assistance Grant provided by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program (sponsored by the Department of Housing and Community Development). The following table provides an overview of the tasks completed and work products.

Date	Tasks Completed	Affiliated Work Products	
6.20.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial Phone session with RiverCulture (RC) Executive Committee to discuss issues and technical assistance services that would be most helpful</li> </ul>	1.	Meeting Notes - 6.20.12, page 4
July 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review RC's economic impact studies from 2007, 2009 and 2011; Review Cultural District Application and Assessment, Review notes from recent retreats and planning sessions.</li> <li>Based upon review of materials, provide assessment summarizing common themes and issues for RC's consideration.</li> </ul>	2.	Technical Memo - 7.21.12, page 6
7.23.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tour the downtown business district with RiverCulture director and planner; review current conditions.</li> <li>Meet with Executive Committee to review the Town's long term goals for RiverCulture, current and planned activities, changes in the creative landscape and "next phase" programming goals</li> </ul>	3.	Meeting Notes - 7.23.12, page 10
8.21.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phone session with Executive Committee to review agenda and determine goals for session with RC Partners.</li> </ul>	4.	Meeting Notes - 8.21.12, page 11
August 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop survey instrument to get feedback from business owners and RC Partners about the potential of establishing a regularly scheduled monthly event.</li> <li>Implement survey electronically, work with RC Director to distribute survey link.</li> <li>Summarize survey results for discussion at Partners Session.</li> </ul>	5.	Survey Results Report-updated – 9.4.12, page 13
8.23.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop agenda and other materials for session with RC Partners.</li> <li>Conduct session and prepare notes</li> </ul>	6. 7.	Session Agenda & Materials – 8.23.12, page 17 Session Notes - 8.23.12, page 23

The work products follow.

## **6.20.12 RiverCulture Meeting Notes**

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### **Work Product #1**

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#### Participants:

Lisa Davol  
Frank Abandanza  
Walter Ramsey  
Peg Barringer

#### Background

- RC needs to shift direction
- More long term attractions, not just one off events
- If people come on an off-day, there should be something to do
- Need more stable attractions
- Won Commonwealth award in 2011
- RC is still part of the town and they feel that this structure is working well
- Staffing includes the Director, Lisa who is part time (25 hrs. per week) plus a Volunteer Coordinator (that receives a stipend for 10 hrs. per month)
- RC has monthly steering meetings; they talked about moving to quarterly meetings but decided to go back to monthly
- Executive committee consists of Frank, Town Administrator, Walter, Town Planner & Lisa, RC Director

#### Previous studies/plans/reports to review

- There have been 3 economic impact studies completed. The recent study done by UMASS Dartmouth included surveys of cultural organizations/partners and a few businesses. Reviewing these studies might be a good stepping off point – we should analyze the results of the studies – look at what directions the findings seem to be pointing the organization toward
- RC previously worked with consultant to identify organizational structure options and there are some notes from this work as well as notes from a Board retreat
- Adams Grant Application- provides information about what activities RC will be undertaking this year
- The recent Cultural District Designation Application Assessment has information that might be useful about the organization and its activities. The application was denied. RC representatives said receiving a designation was probably dependent on how Turners Falls addresses their key redevelopment sites (including the Strathmore Mill, 230,000 sq. ft., now owned by the Town)
- Strathmore Mill -- ULI came in and suggested that the Town wait on issuing an RFP until economy is in better shape; it might be approaching the time now to

issue the RFP (for short time a developer was interested in creating school/film studio at Strathmore property but could not get financing together)

#### Activities underway

- Artistic Cross Walks – replace cross walks with artist designed cross walks
- RC will do programming in the vacant bank building in the Fall
- QR codes project – placed codes around downtown that people could scan with smart phones. Each code links to a story that so visitors/residents can learn about the town history; some codes ask a question about what to put in empty storefronts or what improvements are needed. Example: “I wish \_\_\_\_\_ were here”. “If I ran Turners Falls, I would \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Next Year – the cable company made a proposal to fix up a vacant building at the gateway to the business district and give RC a space (visitor center/gallery space)
- Next Year – the Town plans to do downtown vision plan; RC will participate

#### How I can help? What type of Technical Assistance would be most useful at this time?

- Think more long term
- What goals can we build on?
- How can we measure success?
- What else should we be doing?
- RC has been successful in changing image of the town, getting all of these people to come to amazing events but now what?
- What are possibilities for next phase?
- Recheck about how RC is having CED impacts?
- Other people are taking over doing the events; RC can do something else

**To:** Lisa Davol (RiverCulture Director)  
Frank Abbondanzio (Town of Montague)  
Walter Ramsey (Town of Montague)

**From:** Peg Barringer, FinePoint Associates (Technical Assistance Sponsored by  
Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development)

**Subject:** RiverCulture Situation Assessment – Initial Observations

**Date:** July 21, 2012

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I reviewed the economic impact studies, the Cultural District Application and Assessment Report, the Adams Arts Program Application and notes from the recent retreat and planning sessions. Below are some of my observations.

1. First, it should be stated that RiverCulture (RC) has done a masterful job with the available resources to create a sense of place and improve the quality of life for residents by strengthening arts and cultural industries in Turners Falls. RC has also been successful in transforming the perception of Turners Falls and creating a very positive image that attracts visitors and businesses from outside of town. The current assessment and planning work, in which the organization has engaged, is in an effort to assist RC to continue its valuable work and to target efforts in the most effective manner.
2. Based upon the reports and other material reviewed, it appears that, at this point in time, it would be beneficial for RiverCulture to refocus on a few items:
  - a. Clarify vision and goals
  - b. Revisit and revise strategies to ensure that activities directly map to goals
  - c. Establish evaluation metrics and methods to clearly measure progress against goals
3. In particular, there seems to be a question about the connection between RCs cultural activities and economic development/revitalization of Turners Falls downtown. It is not quite clear what role RC wants to play with regard to improving economic conditions.
4. RCs goals, as stated in their website and other materials include the following:
  - Build a strong, cultural community that contributes to the success of its partner organizations.
  - Build a strong, diverse base of support for cultural economic development among community, political, cultural, educational and business leaders.

- Establish art and culture as a highly visible element of the region's identity.
- Establishing an environment that attracts businesses, residents and visitors to Turners Falls.
- Foster live/work/retail space, studios and new arts facilities in available properties throughout Turners Falls

Although RC's activities accomplish economic development objectives (especially increasing foot traffic and potential sales for local businesses), RC's Goals (as stated) do not expressly address several objectives that are typically associated with economic development/revitalization such as:

- a. Increasing Customers/Foot Traffic/Activity,
- b. Facilitating Business and Job Development and
- c. Encouraging Reinvestment/Real Estate Development/Physical Improvement.

5. Indeed, one of RC's stated goals is "establishing an environment that attracts businesses, residents and visitors to TF". However, it is not clear how proactive the organization wants to be in this regard. The way the goal is phrased seems to indicate a role limited to "place-setting". RC is strategically involved in many town-wide committees influencing economic development policy and has partnered with the business association.
6. There are indications that many stakeholders have a vision that includes more vitality, businesses and foot traffic in the downtown but it is not clear that this is a central vision that is guiding RC's activities.
  - a. For example, in the most recent Impact Study, survey respondents were asked: "What single word would best describe the Turners Falls you would like to see in five years?" Many of the words that respondents mentioned point to a vision of more businesses and foot traffic (e.g., Busy, Flourishing, Hoppin', Successful, Thriving, Vibrant, Vital).
  - b. The Cultural District Assessment Report also indicated that, when asked about their vision, many respondents noted an "active downtown, less empty storefronts, and a wacky, vibrant downtown".
7. RiverCulture needs to first clarify the vision that the organization is working toward and, then, determine if the current strategies are likely to achieve that vision or should new strategies be developed. The Cultural District Assessment Report points out that RC's strategy of promoting the village's identity through festivals and events has resulted in a strong sense of place, however, there are not strategies firmly in place to go to the next stage and transform downtown into "a vibrant destination for residents, business owners, and tourists".

8. RiverCulture events do stimulate spending in the local economy, although, the impact seems primarily limited to the day of the event. If I am interpreting the 2011 Impact Study results correctly, one in three attendees patronize local restaurants and one in four attendees spend money at local stores. The description of the survey results in the impact study, at times, does not appear to zero in clearly on the impacts specific to Turners Falls and it takes a little bit of extra effort to extract the meaningful data. For example . . .
  - a. 2011 Impact Study: 51% of respondents ate or planned to eat lunch or dinner at a restaurant the day the cultural event was held. 66% of these restaurants were located in Turners Falls.  
***I interpret this to mean that 1/3 of respondents ate at Turners Falls restaurants (66% of 51%)***
  - b. 2011 Impact Study: 42% of respondents shopped or plan to shop at a retail establishment and 60% of those businesses were located in Turners Falls  
***I interpret this to mean that 1/4 of respondents shop at Turners Falls stores (60% of 42%)***
9. RiverCulture has successfully attracted visitors to events, now the questions to consider should be:
  - a. How can we get visitors to stay longer each visit?
  - b. How can we get visitors to spend more money locally?
  - c. How can we get visitors to come back (on a non event day)?
10. RiverCulture has established itself as a successful event programming organization. RiverCulture is now considering transitioning from predominantly one-off events to include longer-term strategies that can affect more sustained change, attract more constant foot traffic and offer visitors opportunities on days that there is not an event.
11. The following are examples of the types of strategies that that RC could consider pursuing. This is intended to be illustrative, not an exhaustive list or specific recommendations. If there are a couple of these ideas that resonate, we can provide more information and explore further with RiverCulture.
  - a. Identification and survey of creative enterprises and entrepreneurs in the region to determine what they need to grow, what type of assistance, operating space, etc.
  - b. Social enterprise or co-op gallery for artist to display and sell their work (host demonstrations, etc.)
  - c. Arts incubator providing flexible space and shared equipment and services for creative enterprises
  - d. Incubator “without walls”, providing shared services, equipment, marketing, gallery, website, etc. but not operating space
  - e. Business assistance program – for creative businesses and others



- f. Entrepreneur training for artists/creative businesses
  - g. Buy-Local campaign
  - h. Arts-based job training program
  - i. Culinary social enterprise
  - j. Recruitment of educational institutions
  - k. Targeted real estate development, developer recruitment, marketing
  - l. Marketing program and materials to attract creative and other businesses and entrepreneurs (e.g., promote community as great place to start a business, “Top Ten Reasons to Locate a Creative Business in Turners Falls”, target Hallmark Institute alumni)
  - m. Strengthen connection between cultural activities/events and local economy; create policy for all RC-sponsored events to include local business benefits and local hiring (e.g., local purchasing, include promotional opportunities, showcase products/services, make people aware that the businesses exist and what they offer, provide help for local businesses on how to capitalize on cultural programming/events)
  - n. Create a policy and pledge statement for RC website identifying criteria for how events can impact local economy and have organizations read and agree before submitting their event for promotion on website
  - o. Development of artist live-work space (possibly thru partnership with a CDC in the region) if appropriate market can be identified
  - p. Creation of coupon or other promotion designed to bring event attendees back to Turners Falls businesses on non-event days.
12. New metrics should be developed to measure progress against new/revised goals. (e.g., # of businesses opened minus # of businesses closed = net new businesses, # of businesses expanded, # of jobs created, change in business sales, customer counts, etc.)
13. The Economic Impact Study questions could be revised to provide information that might be more useful in decision-making and strategy development and also more accurately represent the impact on local businesses.
- a. For example, questions could be added to determine how satisfied visitors are with dining and shopping options, and what other types of businesses they would like to see in Turners Falls, rather than only asking if they plan to shop/eat in TF on the day of an event.
  - b. It might be useful to analyze the responses from cultural organizations separately from businesses to better understand the impact on local businesses. For example, in the most recent impact study, 57% strongly agree that cultural events held in Turners Falls are important to the success of their business, while 43% somewhat agree. Results might be more illustrative if the responses from cultural organizations were analyzed separately from other businesses because it seems that all of

the cultural organizations would most logically respond that cultural events are important to their business.

- c. Questions could be asked to provide more factual information rather than opinions or perceptions. For example, businesses could be asked about their actual individual experience with regard to customer counts or sales rather than asking them if they “agree that customers who attend cultural events in Turners Falls visit before or return later to shop/eat/do business”. This might not be very accurate as respondents might be answering because they “think” visitors shop or eat at other businesses, not based on their own experience at their cash registers.
- d. Additional useful information might be obtained by asking businesses what kind of help RC could provide or what suggestions they have for what might be done to increase visitor spending associated with events.

### **7.23.12 RiverCulture Meeting Notes**

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### **Work Product # 3**

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Participants:

Lisa Davol

Frank Abandanza

Walter Ramsey

Peg Barringer

### **Assessment Memo**

We discussed the technical memorandum composed by Peg Barringer covering the situation assessment and initial observations.

### **General Discussion**

Other topics and comments included the following:

#### **Organizational Development**

- RiverCulture organization needs to stay relevant
- There's not many artists actively involved in the partnership, should RC be doing something to recruit?
- Sovereignty Music (that put on the music festival) might be a good partner should we extend an invitation?

#### **Goals and Activities**

- Activities should map to goals. Perhaps activities and/or goals need to be revised.
- Developing an event that would be recurring on a monthly basis like a "1st Friday" arts and cultural events was suggested and discussed

#### **Space for Artisans**

- Lisa has received inquiries from artisans about space availability
- RC might play a more direct role in increasing the number of creative enterprises by facilitating the development of artist studio space or live workspace
- Town is interested in redeveloping several target spaces for artisans (e.g.; Strathmore Mill, Rectory)
- Perhaps RC/Town should explore opportunities with Housing Authority
- It might be advisable to conduct an artist space inventory to determine their needs for artist space

## **8.21.12 RiverCulture Meeting Notes**

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Work Product #4

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Participants:

Lisa Davol

Frank Abandanza

Peg Barringer

### **Town Projects and Recent events:**

- Hallmark is folding their gallery back into their main campus. The school's director recently left under rather bad circumstances.
- The town owns the building that the hallmark gallery occupied - this is an opportunity for the town to look at creating a different type of artist in residence gallery or business artist incubator or some other art related use.
- In addition the town is proceeding with trying to develop the Strathmore Mill property and the St. Ann's rectory building also for creative businesses/arts related uses.

### **Role for RiverCulture:**

- The concept of developing a 1st Friday type ongoing event has resonated with many stakeholders.
- This idea would ensure relevance for River culture.
- River culture has lost some of its relevance because several other organizations have begun producing events. River culture's main role has been producing events, maintaining the website and promoting other organization's events.
- This would be also a way of building an organization because currently the partners involved do not really have an active role -- there needs to be a real way that they can participate and a reason for them to come to meetings and have an organization.
- The consensus of the participants was that it would be best to focus the upcoming meeting with the partners specifically around the idea of establishing an ongoing event (e.g. First Friday) to determine if there would be buy-in from the stakeholders regarding this concept.
- We decided that we would not discuss the other potential development projects that the town is planning as the town would probably continue to play the lead role in those activities.
- RiverCulture may provide an advisory role of some kind in these development projects but if they move forward with the 1st Friday event, that might be there major focus and take up most of their capacity

### **Survey prior to Session with Partners:**

- We decided to develop a survey that stakeholders would be able to complete to give us feedback before the meeting.
- Peg will develop a survey that can be administered electronically and send a link to

Lisa and she will distribute the link to various partners and business owners in the downtown.

- Even if we get a small number of respondents it will give us some fodder for discussion at our next meeting

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**Survey Results Report (updated 9/4/12)**Work Product #5

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**Survey Respondents**

3	Arts/Cultural Organization
1	Artisan
3	Restaurant/Bar
1	Store
1	Local Government
4	Other
1	No Answer
<b>14</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>

- 1. Would you like to see a regularly scheduled (e.g., monthly) multi-disciplinary arts and cultural fest in Turners Falls (that features artists, live music, performances, exhibits, restaurants and businesses) similar to "Third Thursday" and "First Friday" type events held in other communities?**

12	Yes
2	Maybe
	No

- 2. How frequently would you like to see this type of event?**

6	Monthly, Year Round
4	Monthly May to October
	Never
4	Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maybe not have it in December, due to holidays, and Jan, Feb due to winter and possible weather complications, go March thru November</li><li>• Monthly seems hard to sustain. Maybe just 3 or 4 a year? May August September or something</li><li>• Quarterly perhaps</li><li>• Possibly with a winter break Jan-March</li></ul>

**3. What day of the week would you prefer?**

2	Tuesday
1	Wednesday
5	Thursday
5	Friday
1	Doesn't Matter

**4. Would arts/culture organizations and businesses participate and in what ways?**

Arts/Culture Organizations & Entertainment Venues	
2	Yes
4	Maybe
1	No
Restaurants/ Bars, Stores & Other Businesses	
5	Yes
1	Maybe
1	No

*The only "No" response was from Library, staffing limitations was cited as the reason. They responded "no" a cultural organization and a business.*

**Ways Organizations and Businesses would Participate**

- I could offer live music in my Nightclub, it could be a private event in there in the early evening as I do not open it until 10pm, I could also offer themed drink specials depending on what the theme of the event may be, I'm always willing to help but never seem to be asked when any of these types of events occur?
- I would try to schedule new exhibits to open at such times, but I wouldn't have new shows available every single month. Certainly it would be easy to stay open later and offer refreshment. On the other hand, I am not sure we have enough venues to support a monthly endeavor that puts us in competition with nearby towns having similar "night outs" with more venues participating than we have. We would need near 100% participation from the businesses and organizations in town here because there aren't a lot. Is this a revival of the other art walks..? (Just call it art walk so people understand what it is.)
- Booking at the Voo is a complex matrix but we are open to the idea

- It would depend upon staffing capabilities... we could open the GFDC, but again, it's a not for sure! or it could be occasional.
- While I am in support of this, my library coworkers are not willing to volunteer extra hours to work evenings.
- Publicity and promotion
- We could do a dinosaur/geology event, i.e., readings of silly/serious poems about dinos, exhibit of geo/dino art, craft night making dino origami
- We could host a musical or performance art event at Burrito Rojo. Also, we have ample wall space that could be adorned with Artist's work for an opening.
- Possibly lead a hands on make and take project kind of thing at a downtown restaurant. Something with minimal materials cost/bring your own
- Open mics, concerts, gallery openings
- Live music perhaps?
- Art shows/exhibits Refreshments Discounts Music

## 5. Possible names for this recurring event?

Friday Tour of Turners  
 Socializing In Powertown  
 A Night on The "AVE"...Turners Falls Style!  
 Art Walk  
 Tooling Around Turners  
 Travels through Turners  
 Turners' Treasures  
 Great Falls First Fridays  
 Turn Around Night  
 Turners Tuesday #2  
 Night on the Town  
 Talking Walking Turners / Tour the Talent  
 Arts around downtown



or something grand/fancy bordering on silly that stands apart from other towns events

## 6. Suggestions for Themes or Other Comments

- We could do a different theme every month, if you do it 9 months out of the year it would not be hard to have a diverse theme. Solo Music Artist Night, Wine and Cheese Tasting Night, Craft Beer Tasting Night, Local Artists and Crafters Night, Local Band Night, A Taste of Turners Falls Night, Caribbean Night, Harvest Night, Mid Summers Night and so many more, it could be a lot of fun doing this, just ask me and I will definitely give you my input and ideas.
- Monthly is a lot of work maybe. That being said, certainly a map of the downtown with venues marked on it should be made. Who pays for advertising it? Every one benefits, even those who won't pay in and "join" the event officially.
- Tune into the rhythm of the river and nature. Fall, migration, bird migration. Spring, fish and bird migration. Summer, "recreating on the river." Winter, HmMMMM. Counter acting "cabin fever."
- Work with local restaurants that are already doing programming and supplement, don't duplicate. open houses by artists, restaurants, etc. No budget for musicians from RiverCulture.
- Culture and community; art all around us- hidden artistry/living creatively; green community=creative community; activities: when warm outdoor self guided tours like the previous art walks, and vendors in one of the parks, possibly music in the band shell and/or at local restaurants and bars, participatory art either on a large scale anyone can add their bit to a community owned and displayed piece or a smaller scale make your own project led by various local artists in restaurants with enough space or at downtown nonprofits, (a potential for local artists to be introduced/helped thru process of applying for Montague cult council funds to support free for the public projects?), art openings at, well anywhere, Not sure what day of the month/week would be best, it makes me wonder if there are particular days downtown restaurants/bars and shops would like to see more business. I think I just like the alliteration of Turners and Tuesday.
- Street theater from our local theater companies. Young adult musicians playing on the street. Ballroom dance demos by Francis Rahiem (she does a class at the Elks). Acappella groups. Turners High jazz band. Tim DeChristopher carving demos. Belinda's doll making demo. Edite Cuhna's mosaic making demos.
- We love this idea and LOOT would be happy to participate. Thursdays seem like a good night because people are typically not yet committed to other weekend plans or going away etc. We've found the Shag/Jake's night seems to be popular and it is on Thursdays. Sorry it took me so long to fill this out!

**8/23/2012**

**Turners Falls RiverCulture  
Agenda & Supporting Materials**

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Work Product #6

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1. Introductions
2. Purpose of the Meeting: Discuss potential for creating a recurring “First Friday” type event for Turners Falls
3. Background Information
  - a. What is a “First Friday” type event?
  - b. Potential benefits of a monthly recurring arts & culture event day
  - c. Examples of Monthly events held in other communities
4. Discussion Questions for Meeting Participants and Share Survey Results
  - a. Would you like to see a regularly scheduled (e.g., monthly) "First Friday" type event in Turners Falls?
  - b. How frequently would you like to see this type of event?
  - c. What day of the week would you prefer?
  - d. Would arts/culture organizations & businesses participate? In what ways?
  - e. Possible names for this recurring event?
  - f. Suggestions for Themes or Other Comments
5. Decisions and Next Steps
  - a. Would a “First Friday” type event generate the desired economic development benefits? Including:
    - i. Attract customers, increase sales for local businesses
    - ii. Help to attract additional creative and other businesses
    - iii. Establish brand for TF
  - b. Are there actions that could be taken/opportunities to increase the economic development benefits?
  - c. Should we move forward with this new direction for RiverCulture?
  - d. If yes, any suggestions about implementation steps?
    - i. What type of committee structure/meeting schedule?
    - ii. Are there ways to make planning and coordination more efficient?
    - iii. Other?

### **Background Information on “First Friday” Type Events**

1. What is a “First Friday” type event? Typical Components:
  - Regularly scheduled celebration recurring monthly (e.g., 1st Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday, etc.) year round or during part of the year, typically for 3 to 5 hours in the evening
  - On events days, activities occur throughout the downtown
    - Art exhibits, walking tours, street performances, lectures, films, demonstrations, etc.
    - Entertainment venues have performances
    - Stores stay open late and might have special promotions
    - Restaurants might offer food or drink specials
  - Many communities create a “theme” for each event day
  - A coordinating entity handles joint promotion of the event, working with partners to lineup events, publishing a schedule of activities and maps on websites and other social media.
2. Potential benefits of a monthly recurring arts & culture event day
  - i. Attract people to downtown area on a regular basis, increase foot traffic and sales
  - ii. Create bond between downtown and surrounding residents, encourage residents to visit businesses on non event days
  - iii. Attract artisans and other creative businesses to the community by offering regular events where they can showcase there work
  - iv. Establish a brand of distinction for the downtown
3. Examples of Monthly events held in other communities
  - a. Pittsfield -Third Thursday
    - Family-friendly street festival each month from May through October from 5pm-8pm.
    - Music and performance, afterhours shopping, art exhibits, dining
    - Upwards of 10,000 people attend
    - Organized by the City of Pittsfield’s Office of Cultural Development in partnership with downtown businesses, arts organizations, civic groups, artists and other city departments
    - Each event has a theme, examples: June - Country in the City +the Green Mile footrace, July - Tropicalismo + the North Street Beach, August - Call Me Melville+WordXWord Festival, September - A Passion for Fashion+Walk A Mile in Her Shoes, October - Halloween+ Children’s Costume Contest & Parade

b. New Bedford – AHA! (Art, History, Architecture)

- Free celebration on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month year round from 5:00 - 9:00 PM, involves over 60 downtown museums, galleries, arts organizations, merchants, restaurants, The Whaling Museum, Whaling National Historical Park, etc.
- Each month's event has a theme. On a typical AHA! Night - art exhibits, multiple live music, theater skits, lecture, films, walking tours, etc.
- Operating since 1999
- Draw upwards of 2,000 visitors from the city, surrounding towns & Cape Cod. Events present opportunities for performers, artists and humanitarians of all disciplines and levels to engage the public.
- Two weeks before each AHA! Night, a detailed listed of the program is available on the website. Program flyers with maps are also available at all AHA! venues starting the Tuesday prior to each event.
- Programming Partners agree to provide free arts and culture programming/exhibits for a minimum number of AHA nights (i.e., 8 out of 12). Business partners agree to stay open for a specified minimum number of AHA nights. (see membership agreement)
- 2012 Themes: January – Fire & Ice, Feb – Carnevale, March – Hear Me Roar, April – Sustainable South Coast, May – City View, June – Walking Tours, July – Kids Rule, August – Harbor Sounds, September – NB Cultures, October – Naughty & Notorious, November – Please Be Seated, December – Made in NB

Exhibit:

**AHA!**  
**Member Operating Agreement**



## 2010 MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT

AHA! is a cooperative venture dedicated to  
invigorating the downtown arts & culture scene.

**AHA! Partner Organization/Business Name**

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### ANNUAL DUES AMOUNT DETERMINED BY VENUE CATEGORY:

- \_\_\_\_ **Business/Gallery** dues = \$100
- \_\_\_\_ **Non-Profit** dues = .002 of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (organizational budget) not to exceed \$300 & no less than \$50.00
- \_\_\_\_ **Working Artist Studio** dues = \$50
- \_\_\_\_ **Government** – contributions are made on a grant basis and vary for each government entity.
- \_\_\_\_ **AHA! Hero** – Can you stretch and contribute dues of \$300?, AHA! is funded by foundations, city support, generous individuals. Our annual budget associated with the operation of 12 AHA! nights is approximately \$60,000.

### PLEASE MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO “CFSEMA”

- **Fiscal Agent: Community Foundation of SouthEastern Massachusetts**
- **MAIL TO: AHA! The Sundial Building, 63 Union St., 2nd Fl, New Bedford, MA 02740**
- **AHA! Telephone: 508-996-8253 ex: 205**
- **DROP OFF BETWEEN 9-5 DAILY / CFSEMA: 63 Union Street Attention: AHA!**

### SELECT ONE:

- \_\_\_\_ **Active Programming Partner or**
- \_\_\_\_ **Business (Merchant/Restaurant) Partner**

**Active Programming Partners** *will agree to provide free arts and culture programming/exhibits for at least 8 out of the 12 months of the year for AHA! visitors on AHA! Night. Only those venues with programming will be listed on the front of the schedule and the rack card.*

**A Business Partner** *agrees to be open for 8 out of 12 AHA! Nights and can, but is not required to, present cultural events/exhibits. Business partners will be listed on the back of each monthly schedule in the appropriate “where to eat” or “where to shop” sections. Note: All partners are also listed on the website [www.ahanewbedford.org](http://www.ahanewbedford.org).*

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**CONTACTS NAME(S):**

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**ADDRESS:** *Note: All partners who intend to be open for AHA! at their own venue **must have a location in downtown** New Bedford.*

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**PHONE:**

**FAX:**

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**EMAIL:** *As partner communications happen through email, providing an email address is necessary.*

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**AHA! PARTNER SIGNATURE**

**DATE**

## REQUIREMENTS/GUIDELINES:

1. AHA! runs from 5pm to 9pm on the second Thursday of every month. Each Active Programming Participant agrees to be open **for free** on **at least eight AHA! nights throughout the year.** Limited programming reimbursements of up to \$200.00 are available for nonprofit organizations on a first request basis throughout the year.
2. Each Participant agrees to follow the policies and decisions made by the AHA! Committee and staff.
3. Each Participant agrees to work with the AHA! Program Director and AHA! committees on programming, logistics and other AHA! activities (e.g., submitting simple AHA! feedback/facts for grant reporting).
4. Programming partners should make every effort to attend the monthly AHA! programming meetings usually held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month. If partners are unable to attend meeting notes can be made available.
5. **Upcoming programming should be submitted in a timely manner each month.** You must inform the AHA! staff about the programming to be listed! The press for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday is sent out three weeks in advance of the AHA! night and to the Standard-Times one week before the AHA! Night. The "night of" schedule is completed and delivered to partner venues the week of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday. Partners with active programming will be on the front of the schedule and all partners will be listed on the back.
6. **AHA! flags** may be ordered for your venue. Flags are approximately \$44.00. Please inquire to the Program Coordinator at 508-996-8253 ex 202.

## BENEFITS OF AHA! MEMBERSHIP

**AHA! is a cooperative venture dedicated to invigorating the downtown arts & culture scene.**

**The project accomplishes this through:**

- Presenting second Thursday free cultural nights.
- Inviting local and regional artist, cultural groups and educators to present what they do.
- Spearheading cooperative marketing.
- Being a forum for AHA! partners to convene around shared topics.
- Contributing to the City's Creative economy initiatives.

**Other benefits include:**

- AHA! has strong brand and presence throughout the region.
- All members will be listed in full on the AHA! website, [www.wah anewbedford.org](http://www.wah anewbedford.org), and may be linked to their own website.
- Active programming partners may be included in all 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday press releases and will be listed on the monthly AHA! Night flyer which is distributed throughout the downtown region. Partners will also be included on the AHA! collateral such as the rack card and cultural declaration.

### **8.23.12 RiverCulture Partners Session Notes**

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Work Product #7

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#### **Participants:**

Lisa Davol  
Frank Abandanza  
Walter Ramsey  
Linda Hickman  
Ami Podlenski  
Ann Hamilton  
Sarah Doyle  
Bill Gabriel  
Pat Allen  
Peg Barringer

#### **Background Information and Examples form Other Communities**

- We discussed what is meant by a “First Friday” type event.
- We reviewed examples -- Third Thursday Pittsfield and AHA! Nights In New Bedford.
- We also reviewed and discussed the AHA! Membership Agreement which requires *Active Programming Partners* to provide free arts and culture programming/exhibits for at least 8 out of the 12 months of the year and *Business Partners* to be open for 8 out of 12 AHA! Nights.

#### **Survey Results Report**

- We reviewed and discussed the feedback received from business owners and cultural organizations about if they would like to see a regularly scheduled event established, if and how they would participate in such an event, what day of the week would be best, how many events per year, possible names, suggestions for themes, etc.
- A total of 14 businesses and cultural organizations provided feedback via the survey.

#### **General Discussion and Decisions**

- The consensus among the participants was that establishing a “First Friday” type of event would be a good idea to pursue. Cultural organizations as well as businesses were enthusiastic. Some members also noted that there could be a nice tie-in with other events (e.g. Soapbox Derby, Pumpkin festival, etc.) because it would provide opportunities to promote upcoming events.
- Participants discussed the fact that there has already been a “quantum leap” with regard to visitors in Turners Falls an that 10 years ago, “nobody was coming to Turners Falls”. . . And this could be the next step in the progression.



- A couple of businesses have already created a “nano event” on Thursday nights in the summer. Loot stays open late, Jake's provides music, and they cross promote.
- A regularly scheduled event night would be a way for retail and restaurant businesses to get involved. There would be a real commercial connection to their business and hopefully directly affect their revenue.
- We had a lot of discussion about how establishing a regular monthly event could make things much easier for RiverCulture. Right now, every time they do an event or take on a project, it is brand new and they are inventing the tools they need for a single purpose. Creating a “template” for a regularly scheduled event would allow the organization to do more with less. It would be challenging the first time but then, the repetition would make it very manageable. Marketing materials and procedures, space contracts, licenses, insurance documents, etc. could be standardized and used again and again. Volunteers could be trained and then sign up for a regular on-going predictable schedule, where now, new volunteers have to be recruited and trained for each event.
- We discussed the proposed regularity for the events. Participants agreed that it would be best to repeat the same day each month, but perhaps take a break in the winter months after the holidays. Representatives from the Discovery Center shared some of their observations based upon the experience they have gained from hosting their monthly coffee house event. For example, they informed the group that they had a significant increase in attendance when they moved their event from Wednesday to Friday.
- We discussed which day of the week would work best and consensus seemed to be Thursday. People liked the alliteration of “3rd Thursday” however there was concern about competition with Pittsfield's 3rd Thursday event. There was discussion about whether or not, in fact, Turners Falls and Pittsfield would compete for the same market. Many people thought they would not. However, there was also concern that selecting the same night as Pittsfield might impede a cooperative relationship between RiverCulture and Pittsfield and prevent any kind of joint advertising opportunities in the future, such as in the Mohawk Trail Guide.
- Several members commented on the fact that they liked the idea of the membership agreement that is used by AHA! Even if just a nominal fee is charged, it could help to provide a good working relationship between the businesses cultural organizations and RiverCulture.
- We had some discussion about the use of empty storefronts during these events. Suggestions included: art exhibits, promotional opportunities for other events, showcasing empty storefronts to prospective entrepreneurs. There was discussion

about how much easier it would be to use the storefronts for exhibits if the events were held on a regular predictable schedule because a standard contract could be developed and then used over and over. The Artist Committee could be in charge of installations for the empty storefronts.

- We discussed that perhaps RC could start planning monthly events to begin in the Spring of next year. Participants also commented that the Creative Economy Summit will be held in March and this might be an opportunity to find artisans to take storefronts for exhibits and, in general, to connect with Artisans and recruit them to Turners Falls and/or to participate with RC.
- We discussed how RC could use their Producers Grants to encourage new works that would premier on the event nights. Participants also had other suggestions for entertainment and the event in general, such as: including a film component (film archive company), working with the Fall Street Band that plays several concerts for free, tying into the Discovery Center lecture series, tying into the musical performances at the Rendezvous, among others.